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Korea, Republic of

Biotechnology

**July 13 Enforcement of Biotech Labeling
for Processed Food
2001**

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Report Highlights: On June 27, 2001 the Korea Food & Drug Administration (KFDA) initiated the in-country joint explanation session on GMO labeling with the Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry (MAF). KFDA will give a six-month probationary period after the labeling requirement for processed food products was put into effect on July 13. The focus is on guiding industry to properly label products per the new regulation, rather than to penalize the industry. The term, "Non-GMO" is not allowed to be used as part of the labeling for processed food products.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Seoul [KS1], KS

On June 27, 2001 the Korea Food & Drug Administration (KFDA) initiated the seven-day country tour of the joint explanation session on biotech labeling with the Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry (MAF). Through this tour, KFDA and MAF aimed to provide general information on biotechnology and to explain about labeling guidelines for food products enhanced through biotechnology (hereinafter refer to as GM food) and how to implement them. Industry, related associations, related KFDA and MAF officials, and general public were invited for this session.

Gist of the explanation session is as follows;

- Similar to MAF, KFDA will give a six-month probationary period after the labeling requirement for processed food products takes effect on July 13. MAF gave a six-month interim enforcement of the labeling requirement period for unprocessed agricultural commodities last March. Such a decision is based on difficulties KFDA is having in developing testing methods. KFDA will focus on educating and guiding the industry to properly label products during the six months of the new regulation, rather than penalizing the industry. However, KFDA will still have the authority to impose penalties against businesses that intentionally falsely mislabel.
- Enforcement date of July 13 is based on manufacture or processing date for domestic products and import report date for imported products. This means that products manufactured/processed or whose import report falls on or after July 13, shall be subject to KFDA biotech labeling requirements.
- KFDA will use both scientific verification like actual testing and social verification like requiring IP handling certificates.
- KFDA will avoid testing the final food products sold in the market place as there is the possibility of false positive or negative test results due to the limited current testing techniques. Rather, KFDA will focus on controlling the whole process of manufacture of food products before they reach the market place. Such control will include checking of documents such as IP handling certificate, raw material book, etc., so KFDA can track down how a food manufacturer sources raw ingredients.
- In order to prevent confusion resulting from different tests through various testing methods, KFDA will shortly announce the KFDA officially recognized testing method for GM food products. Also, KFDA will announce a list of laboratories recognized by KFDA for GMO test.
- At the explanation session, KFDA clearly stated that the term "Non-GMO" is not allowed to be used as part of the labeling for processed food products. It is because 1) it is almost impossible to verify whether a product is actually made from Non-GMO ingredients with the current technology, 2) false negative test results are possible because proteins are sometimes removed during the manufacturing process.
- Unlike KFDA, MAF allows the used of "this is not GMO" on a voluntary basis.
- KFDA is in the process of revising the GMO labeling guidelines to include another labeling

option "may contain GM XX (e.g. may contain GM soybean)." KFDA advised manufacturers to use this label if they can not verify themselves that their products are not required for KFDA GMO labeling. (Embassy comment: manufacturers can verify themselves that they don't use GM ingredients with IP handling certificates, test results, other documents, etc.)

- KFDA stated that products bearing GMO labeling does not imply a health hazard. KFDA is requiring labeling on the basis of a consumer's right to know. KFDA considers GMO products now in the market now as safe since people in foreign countries have been eating them for a long time and no adverse effects of eating GMO has been evidenced.